

Institution: Leeds Trinity University		
Unit of Assessment: 27 English Language and Literature		
Title of case study: Whores of Yore: Changing attitudes towards sex and sex workers		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2015-2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s): Dr Kate Lister	Role(s) (e.g. job title): Lecturer in English	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: 2013-present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2015-2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No		
1. Summary of the impact		
<p>Research led by Dr Kate Lister has brought the social, cultural, and literary history of sex and sex workers into the mainstream. This has had the impact of challenging stigma about sex and sex work, promoting greater openness in conversations about sex and sexuality, and promoting wellbeing by boosting the self-esteem of sex-workers and people with poor body-image. Lister's research has contributed to campaigns for improved rights for sex workers and has had an impact on public policy over the Managed Approach to sex work in Leeds.</p>		
2. Underpinning research		
<p>Lister's research has changed the perception of sex and sex workers through a better understanding of their history. She has made an extensive social and cultural history of sex and sex workers across the ages, presented through her online research project Whores of Yore (founded 2015). This curatorial project is a digital public engagement resource that makes research on sexuality and the history of sex work freely accessible to the public. Whores of Yore disseminates Lister's research as well as publishing articles by academics, sex workers, activists, artists, therapists, and historians: this combination deliberately aims to break down hierarchies and create conversations around sexuality. It aims to break taboos, by encouraging its audience to 'Be Curious, Not Judgemental', as stated in its byline. This interdisciplinary project is grounded in research into material culture, evidenced most strongly in its page on Vintage Erotica, engaging Lister's collaborative research on exploring the past through its materiality, as represented in her co-edited book <i>Paraphernalia! Victorian Objects</i> (Routledge, 2018), which resulted from a conference on the same name that she co-organised for the Leeds Centre for Victorian Studies.</p> <p>Lister draws on the research material presented in Whores of Yore in her book <i>A Curious History of Sex</i> (2020), in order to demonstrate that the ways in which society dictates how sex is culturally understood and performed have varied significantly through the ages. She points out that humans are the only creatures to stigmatise particular sexual practices, that sex remains a deeply divisive issue around the world, and that sex will never be free of stigma or shame unless we acknowledge where it has come from.</p> <p>Lister has made a particular contribution to understanding the significance of sex work within local history through the online resource, 'The History of Sex Work in Leeds'. This presents a timeline from the late 18th century to 2017, detailing the work of charitable organisations, police initiatives, outreach programmes, court proceedings, and incidents of violent crime against sex workers. It draws on archival material from Leeds Central Library, Brotherton Library, Police Records at West Yorkshire Archives, newspaper archives, archives at the Basis Yorkshire charity, police reports, court records and press coverage to shed light on how charities, the law, residents and police have responded to sex work over the decades.</p>		

Impact case study (REF3)

Lister's work is an important outworking of the Mission Statement of Leeds Trinity, which espouses 'principles of dignity, respect, social justice, equality and inclusion ... the University is here to make a difference to the people, the professions and the places that we serve' (<https://www.leedstrinity.ac.uk/about/mission-vision-values/>).

3. References to the research

Kate Lister, *A Curious History of Sex* (Unbound, 2020). Book.

'Although there are plenty of men in this book ... it is unavoidably an account of injustice against women, and a compelling one.' *The Guardian* (29.1.2020)

--- 'The Pen is Mightier than the Whore: Victorian Newspapers and the Sex-Work Saviour Complex', *The Routledge Companion to Sex, Sexuality and the Media* (2017) (REF2, Lister1) Article in a peer-reviewed collection.

--- (curator) Whores of Yore, <http://www.thewhoresofyore.com/about.html> (2015-) 'website (and excellent Twitter feed) Whores of Yore' *New York Times*

--- The History of Sex Work in Leeds

<https://www.tiki-toki.com/timeline/entry/1051767/The-History-of-Sex-Work-in-Leeds/>

Helen Kingstone and Kate Lister (eds) *Paraphernalia! Victorian Objects* (Routledge, 2018). <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351172844> 'There is much to admire in this volume.' *Victorian Studies* 61:4 (2019)

4. Details of the impact

Research led by Lister has had an impact on (a) public attitudes to sex and sexuality; (b) wellbeing and body image; (c) public understanding of sex workers and sex-workers' self-esteem; and (d) public policy. Lister has achieved this impact by using broadcast, print, and social media to disseminate greater knowledge and understanding of these issues, and to promote positive conversations about them. Her work has reached a wide audience, both geographically and numerically, for example:

- The Whores of Yore twitter account (@WhoresofYore) has **463.8K** followers
- Lister's personal twitter account (@k8_liste) has **21.6K followers**
- *A Curious History of Sex* sold **4,500 hardback copies and 3,400 ebook copies in its first 6 months**, and its publication was supported by 1,700 crowdfunding pledges.
- Lister has a regular column in *The i Paper* (<https://inews.co.uk/author/dr-kate-lister>)
- Lister's commissioned pieces for the Wellcome Collection include articles that have been read by over **21K viewers** and a twitter thread that reached **430K Twitter** users (RileyWellcome2.pdf)

Lister also contributes to *The Guardian* and *BBC History Magazine*. Her media appearances include the Channel 5 programme *My Fantasy* (September 2017), a piece on 'The Modern Face of Sex Work' on Sky TV's *Tell Vanessa* (26 February 2017). Lister regularly appears on podcasts, including an interview with Hannah Witton on the YouTube podcast *Doing It* <https://doingitpodcast.co.uk/> (631,000 subscribers). Her public talks include appearances at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival, the Cheltenham Literature Festival, and the Science Museum.

(a) Impact on public attitudes towards sex and sexuality

Lister's impact on public understanding and attitudes is evidenced in positive responses to her twitter feeds such as '***I love everything you are talking about and bringing out into the open for more discussion***' (Boatierra, WoY_Tweets.pdf) and '***Thank you for your work in disproving that sexuality, namely female sexuality, is just some modern moral shortcoming***' (La Sirene, WoY_Tweets.pdf).

Lister's impact can also be gauged by the popularity of her journalism and web articles, both statistically and in terms of positive responses from readers. Heather Saul, Online Comment Editor and Women's Editor at *The i Paper*, writes that Lister's articles are '**regularly among our most read stories of the month, and score high on engagement**, which means our readers are more likely to read the whole article, to share it, and to discuss it online.' They are also popular in terms of the feedback received from readers of all ages: Saul quotes a reader who describes Lister as '**one of your most informative and eloquently entertaining columnists.**' (SaulTheiPaper.pdf). Dr Kirsten Riley, Social Media Manager at the Wellcome Collection, reports that Lister's article, 'The metamorphosis of masturbation' is '**one of our most popular articles on the site and also across social media**' (RileyWellcome2). Lister's impact was recognised by her receiving the [Sexual Freedom Award for Publicist of the Year 2017](#). 'Sexual Freedom Awards promote excellence in sexual performance and services – and acknowledge pioneers in the sexuality field.'

(b) Positive impact on wellbeing and body image

Lister's work has had a positive impact on the wellbeing of readers and viewers by promoting positive body image. Lister has broken taboos about women's bodies in popular talks on the history of pubic hair at the Edinburgh Fringe and various talks on the history of the word 'cunt', including a talk at the Science Museum and a TEDx Talk '[The History of a Nasty Word](#)'. Her work has had a particular impact on women and women of colour: Christina Slater described the Whores of Yore Twitter account as a '**sex positive, beauty standard busting, racially inclusive feed ... the number 1 healthiest and most helpful of the almost 200 accounts I follow**' (WoY_Tweets.pdf). Nixi Allen wrote on Twitter that '**your account has done more for me in terms of body acceptance and positivity than anything I have come across**' (WoY_Tweets.pdf).

(c) Impact on public understanding of sex workers and on sex workers' self-esteem

Lister has had a particular impact on the public understanding of sex workers, and she has had an impact on the wellbeing and self-esteem of sex workers by giving them a voice. Lister works closely with Basis Yorkshire, a charity supporting female sex workers and young people experiencing sexual exploitation in Leeds. She has helped raise the profile of their work by hosting their blog on Whores of Yore. Amber Wilson, Business Development and Marketing Manager with Basis, testifies that Whores of Yore raised awareness of '**significant issues sexworkers face which at the time (when the blog was launched) was near impossible to do given the unpopularity and small scale of publicity around our work.**' (WilsonBasis1.pdf) Saul's testimony shows that Lister's journalism has brought these concerns to the attention of the general public through the national press: 'Her in-depth knowledge of the issues surrounding sex work has ensured sex workers are represented in our newspaper' (SaulTheiPaper1.pdf).

Lister has also given sex workers a voice by collaborating with them. The online timeline, 'The History of Sex Work', was a collaboration with Basis, and this developed into an oral history project, for which Lister was the consultant, resulting in the publication, *Our Voice: Perspectives to Challenge Stigma and Stereotypes Around Sex Work* (Leeds: Delta, 2017), supported by the Rosa Fund. Lister enabled five sex workers to tell their stories in a guest-edited series for the Wellcome Collection, 'Reframing Sex Work'. As Wilson writes, this project has had the impact of '**Enabling the voices of women who are often less represented in the media through the telling of their story** as part of the Wellcome Collection – not only contributing to the **documentation of a diverse set of voices, but also empowering women** in the knowledge that they have contributed to greater understanding of the issues they and their peers face.' (WilsonBasis1.pdf). Furthermore, by sharing the accounts of sex workers in her articles for *The i Paper*, Lister has enabled a national paper to 'give their experiences a platform' (SaulTheiPaper1.pdf).

Lister has had the impact of causing readers, viewers, and listeners to rethink their views. After Lister's Leeds Trinity talk 'Challenging the Stigma of Sex Work in the Media' (6 November 2019, audience 186; YouTube trailer audience 550), an audience member who had come from Germany because she had heard of Lister's work on Twitter, commented that '**her charisma in conveying the information ... makes you rethink opinions you had had, judgements [you had made].**'

Marius Hollenga, wrote on Twitter: **'Follow @WhoresofYore It will change your perspective on sexuality, sex and sexwork, and humanity in general.'** (WoY_Tweets.pdf) The impact of Lister's messaging can also be measured by the financial benefits she has brought to Basis, for example by promoting a fundraising event that raised £40,000 (WilsonBasis1.pdf). Lister also helped the charity, and publicised their work, by donating the £7,949 proceeds of her book, *A Curious History of Sex* to Basis.

Lister has raised awareness of the issue of violence against sex workers (WilsonBasis1.pdf), and a video clip Lister made on the subject had 55.6K views on Twitter and was retweeted 200 times. With Basis, Lister co-designed a Leeds-based exhibition commemorating the lives of sex workers murdered in the city. For this project, she recruited 17 students to commemorate the last 17 sex workers who were murdered in Leeds and Bradford between 1978 and 2010. Students researched the life of one of the victims and explored how media representations influence social attitudes and the use of derogatory language against sex workers, before producing a piece of writing in remembrance. She was shortlisted as the Most Innovative [Teacher of the Year at the Times Higher Education \(THE\) Awards](#) 2020 in recognition of this project.

(d) Impact on public policy

Lister's research has had an impact on public policy by securing support for Leeds City Council's 'Managed Approach' (MA) to sex work in Leeds, which Lister brought to national attention in an article for *The i Paper* (3 August 2018). The MA permits sex work within a specific zone of the city at particular times of the day and provides sex workers with emotional and practical support and protection from violence. The MA is regularly challenged and Lister has made influential contributions to Leeds City Council's debates on this matter: her work was cited as a 'very important piece' (Councillor S. Gordon, 14th November 2018 at 4:46:05) in supporting a successful amendment that the MA should be continued but with better resourcing. Basis regularly use Lister's timeline to challenge misinformation on the MA and they have used it to frame discussion in two national webinars. As Wilson affirms, it 'continues to be a highly useful reference tool' (WilsonBasis1).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

Testimonials

WilsonBasis1.pdf Testimonial by Amber Wilson, Business Development and Marketing Manager, Basis Yorkshire.

RileyWellcome1.pdf Testimonial by Dr Kirsten Riley, Social Media Manager, Wellcome Collection

SaulTheiPaper1.pdf Testimonial by Heather Saul, Online Comment Editor and Women's Editor, *The i Paper*.

Online evidence

Leeds City Council

https://leeds.public-i.tv/core/portal/webcast_interactive/384955/start_time/17165000

A recording of Leeds City Council's (14 November 2018) debate on a White Paper on maintaining the managed approach to sex work in Leeds. Lister's research is cited at 04:46:05 in support of an amendment that was carried.

Sexual Freedom Awards

<https://www.sexualfreedomawards.co.uk/2017-finalists>

Evidence of Lister's award for Publicist of the Year 2017

Times Higher Education

<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/people/interview-kate-lister>

Evidence of Lister's shortlisting for Teacher of the Year at the THE Awards 2020

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Yorkshire Evening Post

<https://www.yorkshireeveningpost.co.uk/news/history-sex-work-leeds-timeline-reveals-evolution-holbecks-managed-zone-272204>

Article demonstrating public interest in Lister's timeline of sex workers

Social Media

WoY_Tweets.pdf – Screenshots of five tweets (Allen, Boatierra, Hollenga, La Sirène, Slater)